

Spanish Town Learns to Live With H-Bomb Memory

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church, "Palomares is disappearing, like a lot of other places."

Contrary to the Mayor's assurances that the town was about to get its first resident priest in years, Father Alascio said, "Palomares will never have a priest of its own. There are not enough priests, for few young men feel the calling."

He said Palomares would have to depend on Cuevas for its spiritual needs just as it depends on Cuevas for its bread.

At End of a Side Road

Palomares is at the end of a narrow winding side road, five miles from a main highway. Only the main street is paved, and down the rutted side roads, the low white-washed houses sprawl toward the sea.

There is a good but not very accessible beach and if a projected road is built along the coast, Palomares may share someday in Spain's tourist boom. Right now, for excitement, a truck pulls up in the center every now and then and all the women gather to buy clothes and shoes.

The hall that used to show movies twice a week has closed, but in compensation, television antennas sprout from almost every roof. Recently the town got its first telephone, a red one, which sits behind the bar of one of the four cafes where the

men gather after work and talk about the weather or the crops.

They will talk about the bomb only when prodded. Some say a lot of animals and people got sick and one man cited the case of a woman who suddenly dropped dead while walking a few months ago.

"Because of the bombs?" he was asked.

The answer was a shrug and a "Quién sabe?"

Whatever bad luck Palomares has had in recent years is linked in a vague and uncomprehending way to the bombs. A year after they fell, the area suffered one of its rare frosts, which damaged the tomato crop. Three years ago, the orange trees died, but it was found that the ground water had become saline. Now the water has improved and the oranges, which grow in abundance just a mile or so back of Palomares, may return.

U.S. 'Treated Us Badly'

There is still some rancor evident against the Americans, not so much because they dropped the bombs but because in the subsequent financial settlement for damages, "they treated us badly."

This was stated by an elderly retired schoolmaster who insisted that his name be printed despite warnings from friends that he could wind up in prison.

Francisco, Alarcón lost most of his students in the first moments of panic and has claimed damages since for having had to close his school. Two engines of the B-52 fell some 60 yards from Mr. Alarcón's house. Since then, he has suffered skin eruptions, he says.

"Because of the bombs?" he was asked.

Another shrug. "Perhaps from the fright," he said.

Mr. Alarcón is still waiting for his money. The embassy in Madrid says that of 644 claims received, 535 were settled for slightly over \$727,000. Ninety-eight claims were rejected, four are still being disputed and seven disposed of in an undisclosed manner.

A more permanent contribution to the well-being of Palomares is a desalting plant

now going into full operation to make up for a chronic shortage of potable water. A gift from the United States, the plant will furnish drinking water to Palomares and a large area around it, which up to now has had to import water along with priests and bread.

The other concrete reminder of what happened here are two small structures that look like bird houses until one notices a metal rod sticking out of one side and hears a whirring sound.

They are measuring any possible radioactivity in the air. Together with water and earth samples, the findings are studied in Madrid in the office of the National Atomic Energy Board.

Dr. Eduardo Ramos, the board's chief physician, called the operation "just routine." He said the counters had been set up for an indefinite period but that there was really nothing to worry about.

"Have you tried the tomatoes?" he asked. "They're the best there are."

DOE ARCHIVES

Palomares Lives With Memory of H-Bomb

By HENRY GINIGER

Special to The New York Times

PALOMARES, Spain, Oct. 25 —The tomato crop here is doing well this year and as tomatoes go so goes Palomares. Almost seven years after this obscure and unkempt Andalusian town became unwillingly famous when four American hydrogen bombs were dropped on or around it, almost everyone agrees that "everything is normal—more or less."

Like most other Spanish farming communities, Palomares has its troubles, mostly with youths who do not wish to stay. But those who have remained have gone on living much as they did before Jan. 17, 1966, when an American B-52 bomber jettisoned its bombs after colliding in midair with a refueling plane.

"It is almost forgotten," or "It is part of history" are two stock answers a visitor gets when he asks townspeople about the event. They seem reluctant to talk about it or give their names when they discover the inquirer is a journalist. Apparently they fear official disapproval.

Mayor Objects to 'Lies'

José Manuel González, Mayor for the last 14 years, would like to finish once and for all with what he calls the "lies" about Palomares.

"Why doesn't some American firm make an investment here?" he asked. "A plant or a hotel, for example, just to prove that Palomares is safe."

The stout 61-year-old Mayor also happens to own one of the town's bigger tomato patches. Right now the tomatoes are ready for picking. Fingering them lovingly, Mr. González said: "The best tomatoes in the world!" They are shipped to all parts of Spain and abroad and constitute the town's best cash crop.



Mayor José Manuel González, of Palomares, Spain, owner of one of the town's bigger tomato patches, wonders why Americans don't invest in the town to prove that it is safe.

Finding tomato pickers is one of the town's biggest problems. Bomb or no bomb, Palomares has experienced the fate of all rural Spain—the exodus to where more money can be earned.

It may be to a hotel in some nearby resort or, further afield, to Madrid or Barcelona or even abroad. Mayor González and others are at best vague about the town's population—"about a thousand" is the most current estimate—for, as one cafe owner remarked, "People go. People come back."

Some Home for Winter

One frequently finds people who have worked in France, Belgium, Switzerland and West Germany. With approaching winter, the weather is still warm and people work in the fields in their shirtsleeves. They point to the sun as one reason for preferring Palomares to a factory or a French movie house.

When the bombs fell, people panicked and left in a hurry. "They were not very smart," remarked a laborer as he pruned a flourishing lemon tree. "They ran off to Barcelona, then they came back complaining that Barcelona was more polluted than Palomares could ever be."

On the whole, however, Palomares has lost population. For the Rev. José Alascio Herrero, the young Roman Catholic priest, who comes from nearby Cuevas to hold Sunday mass in the town's tiny weatherbeaten

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